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CASCADE COUNTY ESTABLISHES NEW SELF-HELP LAW CENTER

By Kay Rossi/KRTV



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The Cascade County Courthouse has a new resource available for those in need of legal help.

Lauren Goulding is one of two staff members at a new Self-Help Law Center established by Cascade County's four District Court Judges.

"What we do is we help people who

cannot afford lawyers," Goulding said.

Center staff are not lawyers, but they are trained in Montana law.

"The people who work at the center aren't attorneys, but they do have training in the basics of Montana law and the basics of helping self-represented litigants," Goulding said.

The center can help people representing themselves in cases of divorce, step-parent adoption, custody, child support and debt collection among others.

The center cannot provide legal advice, and staff cannot fill out or correct forms for patrons. What they can do is provide the necessary paperwork and explain how to fill it out.

"This is a great resource to have because there is a lot of unmet legal need in Montana generally, so there are a lot more people who need legal help than can afford attorneys and this is a great way of helping people help themselves," Goulding said.

It's all part of an effort to provide help for the public while enhancing court efficiency.

"The county commissioners were good enough to provide the space for us here in the courthouse, so at this point we're operating on a shoe string, but we are able to provide the services," said Cascade County District Court Judge Kenneth Neill.

The center is funded by an appropriation from the state legislature and additional support will come from other resources like the state Attorney General's Office of Consumer Protection and the Self-Help Law Program.

Goulding said in the first few days of operation, the center has already seen a good response with about 25 patrons stopping in for help.

Right now the center is open Mondays and Tuesdays. Judge Neill says hours may be extended in the near future based on the need and response.

You can contact the center at 590-4127.

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